

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL
MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 8, 2014**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta called the September 8, 2014 Economic Development Subcommittee of the Town Council meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Councilor Tim Moriarty (Entered at 5:05 p.m.), Councilor Cathy Vargas and David Schweitzer (Alternate). Also present was: Ray Carpentino (Economic Development Director).

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta asked if there was anyone from the public who wished to speak at this time. There was no one who wished to speak.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES/WORKING NOTES

Councilor Cathy Vargas made a motion to approve the Minutes and Working Notes of the June 2, 2014 meeting of the Economic Development Subcommittee. The motion was seconded by Chairwoman Meg Casasanta and adopted unanimously by those present. (Councilor Tim Moriarty was absent at this time.)

4. DISCUSSION/ACTION: STEAP

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta mentioned that the State will need to know by November 28, 2014 about the applications for the 2015 round of STEAP (Small Town Economic Assistance Program) grant funding because that date is the deadline for this. She told this Subcommittee that they have an opportunity to make some recommendations to the Town Council about some possible Capital Improvement projects that they might want to recommend.

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta asked Ray Carpentino if he wanted to speak about this further. Ray Carpentino said that OPM had announced the 2015 round of STEAP grant funding on August 12, 2014 and he said this was pretty quick after the 2014 STEAP round that they had just received money for. He thought it would be a good idea to have this passed through this Subcommittee since they are the liaison to the Town Council. This Town has funded the Silas Deane Highway Streetscape in the past with STEAP funds and this includes Phase I and Phase II of this. This is in addition to the Silas Deane Highway Façade Improvement Program. All of this had been

initiated back in 2005. The Town didn't receive funding the year before this year or the year before that either in order for them to continue with Phase II of the Silas Deane Highway Streetscape or to continue with the Silas Deane Highway Façade Improvement Program. Councilor Cathy Vargas asked if the Town didn't apply or if they just didn't get it. Ray Carpentino said that they applied but they just didn't get this. Over the past two years, there are six businesses that have been waiting for façade money. He said that he had a list of suggested projects for them to look at. (Please see the First Attachment.) He told them that they can add to this list or they can take things off of it or they can even discuss this further with the Town Council. He mentioned how they can maybe even have the Façade Program extended to the businesses on Cromwell Avenue in addition to the Silas Deane Highway. He said another possible project could be for them to provide a new generator, which would cost approximately \$200,000 to \$250,000, for the Police Station/Emergency Operations Center. He believed that the Town had applied for a grant last winter for this but they didn't get it.

Councilor Cathy Vargas asked if they could apply for a couple of different projects for the \$500,000. Ray Carpentino said that they could apply for more than one project but they would have to prioritize this. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said that makes sense. Ray Carpentino said that the maximum grant is for \$500,000 for each Town. Chairwoman Meg Casanta said the State will want to know the order the Town would want the projects done in and then they can look at this. Ray Carpentino said right.

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said these were great ideas. She said that she would like to see a CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) list that is updated just so they can see if there is anything else that the Town Council would want to address at that time or to see if they have any ideas about potential projects with STEAP funding. She mentioned how Rocky Hill had just gotten the grant for McVicar Field so hopefully they will still be in line to receive something from the State. She said how it is definitely worth it for them to apply.

Councilor Cathy Vargas referred to the Silas Deane Highway Façade Improvement Program and she said that she hadn't been on the Town Council at that time. She said the benefits of this can be seen on the Silas Deane Highway but she asked Ray Carpentino if he could please explain how much each business is eligible to get. Ray Carpentino referred to the way that current program is worded and he said this would be up to a maximum of 75% of the project cost and up to a maximum of \$50,000. Councilor Cathy Vargas asked if this is per business. Ray Carpentino said it is. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta asked Ray Carpentino if he has heard any feedback from the community which would indicate that there is a priority from their standpoint that the Town Council might want to be aware of when they are making this decision. Ray Carpentino said the comments that he has received are with regards to when the Town will be getting more façade money and people are also asking him about what happened to the other half of the Streetscape. He mentioned again about the generator at the Police Station which they applied for because that is in excess of twenty years old and that is the maximum amount of time that is recommended by the State for its replacement. He told them that there are some projects that are out there. He said that a few businesses have also questioned him as to why they don't have façade money for Cromwell Avenue.

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta asked Councilor Tim Moriarty if he had any questions and he said no.

5. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ray Carpentino referred to the redevelopment status of Ames. The Morgan Reed Group had contacted him two weeks ago to tell him that the new revised closing date will probably be September 9, 2014 or September 10, 2014. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said that this has changed quite a bit and she said that hopefully this is it. Ray Carpentino said that this is a moving target. He said that he has been contacted by a commercial realtor who has a client who may be interested in going into a partnership to develop part of that project maybe. He believes that this might be for retail. He mentioned that he also was contacted by another realtor who has a client who is possibly interested in working with the new owner for redevelopment. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said this is good and she said this looks like that there are some "bites" on this project that will come to fruition hopefully. She asked Ray Carpentino to keep them up-to-speed on this. Ray Carpentino said that he is always optimistic. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said good.

Ray Carpentino said that he and the Economic Development Commission have completed ten business visitations since they started the Visitation Program. The Sheraton Hotel was the last business that was visited. They are always looking for feedback as far as if Rocky Hill has been a hindrance or if the Town can do any more, etc. There have been no issues with the Town government or with the Town Staff so far. The businesses' issues are at the State and federal level primarily with regards to regulatory issues and taxes. All of the businesses love their location in Rocky Hill because it is an easy access to them. Some of the retailers have drawn business from Newington, Cromwell and Old Saybrook.

Ray Carpentino referred to the Municipal Solar Energy Project (solar farm) on the Town's property. Five proposals have been received from the solar industry. The Town is working with Town Attorney Morris Borea and the consultant to go through these to come up with criteria that will be ranked. Ray Carpentino believes at the next Town Council meeting that there will be a recommendation for some type of a Committee to be formed for this to have these reviewed. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said very good and she said that she is glad to see that this is moving along.

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta asked if there was any news on Town Center West. Ray Carpentino said that Rich Vicino, the developer, received a letter from the Department of Transportation (DOT) indicating that their approval is pending. This has allowed Rich Vicino to close on this property. Ray Carpentino said that Rich Vicino had been out at that property this morning and a new sign is up there stating that the occupancy for Town Center West will be in the fall of 2015. Ray Carpentino said that some site preparation and some more survey work is starting to be done there now. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said great and she knows that a lot of people are anxious to see what is going to happen with this. This is especially because of the Plan of Conservation and Development that is going on as well and how the issue of multi-family housing is being looked at. She questioned how all of these projects will play into that

and what the vision of this Town will be. She thinks that this is all great news. Ray Carpentino said that things take time and sometimes it is a “painful wait” for things to happen.

Ray Carpentino referred to the River’s Edge Project (the foundry project). He talked to that Attorney the other day. Some selective clearing has been done along the bank in order to take all of the evasive species out and to open some of the views up. It will take ten weeks to complete the Phase III Environmental Study and the Remedial Action Plan. This is moving very slowly. The DOT is also being dealt with. Councilor Tim Moriarty said that is a State road so they have to get approval from the DOT. Ray Carpentino said that Glastonbury Avenue is a State road. Councilor Tim Moriarty said that the DOT will have to approve any changes that are done and this is a “whole other animal” because railroad tracks are going across it.

Councilor Cathy Vargas said that she thought the silos would be coming down soon. Councilor Tim Moriarty doesn’t think that can be done until the DOT approves the road. The whole footprint of this project could be changed if they don’t get the road approval. Ray Carpentino agreed.

Ray Carpentino said that they had talked about STEAP already.

Ray Carpentino said he has two requests for microbreweries, which are quite a popular business. This is a little complicated because a brewery component is really a manufacturing use. All of the breweries like to have a tap room, which would be more of a restaurant/retail use. They could only have this in the Business Park Zones in Rocky Hill. This would be the side of the road that Burris is on, on Brook Street, and also the Laurel Road area on Dividend Road. They wouldn’t be able to have these in the rest of Rocky Hill so this is very restrictive. He is struggling to find properties for these but he sent out a few which may have potential. This is the third request for breweries in the past two years. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said they should try to do something to make this happen and they should do anything to bring people into Rocky Hill. Ray Carpentino told them that they should probably be looking at suggesting some changes in their zoning so that this can be allowed because most of the Towns are changing their Regulations to allow this. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said this would be a great time to “plug this” into the Planning and Zoning Commission to tell them to try to think about this because they have these business opportunities so this would be for them to try to make it easier for them to come in. This would also be since they are doing the whole Plan of Conservation and Development over too.

Ray Carpentino said that he is still working with a manufacturer, who needs to almost triple his manufacturing space. This manufacturer wants to stay in Rocky Hill because he has been here for decades. Ray Carpentino said he had found a property that might have worked for this but he is thinking now that this is a little bit too small and this property isn’t listed. There are no properties for sale in Rocky Hill that allow manufacturing, except for one four acre piece but a 40,000 square foot building wouldn’t be able to be put on it. He said that he is struggling to find a site that won’t require a zone change. Councilor Tim Moriarty referred to the property where Hartford Steel Ball is because he said that used to be manufacturing there. Ray Carpentino said that is manufacturing but Hartford Steel Ball is still operating and they have actually expanded a bit. There are also other businesses that are in that building. He explained that the manufacturer

who he is working with wants doesn't want to co-locate with another entity and he also said that Hartford Steel Ball doesn't want to sell their property. Rocky Hill has a lot of Office Park Zone. The Economic Development Commission is trying to recommend to the Planning and Zoning Commission to incorporate into the Plan of Conservation and Development, the adding in of another zone maybe that will allow restricted manufacturing. He said that most manufacturing is clean and high tech now. He said that maybe these lots can be required to be bigger. There are half acre lots right now in the Business Park Zone for contractors' yards but he doesn't know if this would be appropriate for Cromwell Avenue or for Brook Street. Councilor Tim Moriarty asked Ray Carpentino if he has ever contacted the owner of the old Pratt & Whitney property to see if he wants to part some of that out. Ray Carpentino said he has contacted him. Councilor Tim Moriarty said that would be perfect there, especially the north end of that. Ray Carpentino said one of the problems there is that they have to be very careful where they excavate because there are land use restrictions there due to the contamination. Councilor Tim Moriarty said the south end of that property is loaded with that. Ray Carpentino said that is towards the stream, as usual.

Ray Carpentino said this was all that he had for his Director's Report.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

Ray Carpentino said this Subcommittee had asked him a while back if he had an inventory of available spaces in Rocky Hill. He came up with an inventory and he was then asked if he could put this in a spreadsheet so he did that. He passed out a copy of this to all of them. (Please see the Second Attachment.)

Ray Carpentino said that he had asked the Assessors' Office to give him all of the commercial properties. The first few pages of his inventory are with regards to the retail inventory and then there is the office inventory. The last section of this inventory is with regards to industrial-flex space. This is alphabetical with the owners' names (Column A) and the addresses (Column B and C), as well as what the uses are (Column D). The style (Column E) is also listed and this is a more specified use. The gross floor area is listed in Column F and the available square footage that he has an inventory for is in bold print in Column G. Column H lists the properties that are for sale and Column I lists the properties that are for lease. The Town has 1,823,295 square feet (gross floor area) of commercial retail and just under 7% of this is vacant. He said that is pretty good. Councilor Tim Moriarty said that has got to be pretty good for the industry especially with them coming off of the times that they have had.

Ray Carpentino referred to the inventory for office space. Rocky Hill has 1,974,207 square feet of that and 19.7% of that is vacant. That amount includes 179,000 square feet with regards to Ames though. They are at 80% and he said that is decent.

Ray Carpentino referred to the inventory for industrial-flex space and he said that has approximately 10% vacancy. He has been getting a lot of requests from companies that want to buy and own but most of the Town's space is for lease so these companies have to go elsewhere. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said this is because the companies want to buy. Ray Carpentino said yes. He mentioned that this is a decent problem to have though because they aren't in dire

straits. He said that they probably need to look at how they can modify some of the Zoning Regulations if they want Rocky Hill to keep attracting businesses, adding to the tax base and adding employment, as well as keep contributing to the customer base with retailers. Councilor Tim Moriarty said one thing that they need to look at is Burris. He didn't know the date off of the top of his head or the timeframe but he said that Burris is supposed to do their second phase by a certain date and they had been given an extension on their tax break. He told them that they should check to see when that is coming up. He said the area behind that building wouldn't be a bad one for manufacturing if Burris isn't looking to expand there. He confirmed that they would be talking about light manufacturing and not heavy manufacturing. Ray Carpentino said yes and he said that most manufacturing here is considered light. Councilor Tim Moriarty said if someone is looking for a footprint for a 40,000 square foot building that people wouldn't even know it is there if it is behind Burris. He mentioned how Burris was supposed to have a total of 750,000 square feet but he said it doesn't look like they are going to do that. Ray Carpentino said he got a call from people from Burris and they want to come from Florida to meet him. They have been going back and forth with regards to scheduling a date to have this done. He told Councilor Tim Moriarty that he is right. Councilor Tim Moriarty said the infrastructure is there. He explained some more and he said that wouldn't even be a bad spot for the brewery. Ray Carpentino said that is zoned for that too. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said very good.

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said she was going to get back to talking about STEAP for Councilor Tim Moriarty's benefit because he hadn't been present at the beginning of this meeting and she told him that he might have some great ideas too about potential opportunities. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta told Councilor Tim Moriarty that they were just going to take a look at the current CIP and look at the suggestions that were made by Ray Carpentino. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said that they can make some broad recommendations to the Town Council about some of the things that they can do going forward. She told Councilor Tim Moriarty to keep an eye out for that.

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta asked if there were any other questions. Councilor Tim Moriarty referred to the Ames' building and he asked what will happen if people want to come in with mixed use for that. He then said that they will have to walk away. Ray Carpentino said they will have to assuming that a moratorium is passed. Councilor Tim Moriarty said that will really "tie the strings" to that piece of property. Ray Carpentino said that will be unless the housing is age restricted or elderly housing. He explained that the key to a vibrant downtown is mixed use residential. Councilor Tim Moriarty asked if anyone had seen the article in the newspaper with regards to Hebron Avenue and Main Street in Glastonbury. There is mixed use there. There are apartments and condos, etc. He said people are walking around down there and it is back to the way it had been. It is striving there. He mentioned about the night they did this (with regards to the moratorium) and he didn't think that was the right thing to do at this time with this piece of property (Ames) up for something like that. He agrees with the whole concept of it but then he referred to the Ames' property again. Councilor Cathy Vargas said that she thought that had just been more of a recommendation for the Planning and Zoning Commission. Councilor Tim Moriarty asked if they have gone through with that yet. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said that she thinks that there will be a public hearing for this the first week in October. Councilor Tim Moriarty mentioned about that being held up in order to see what happens with the Ames' property. He said that basically that whole area was set for this. He mentioned that the

Streetscape was designed so that people could walk around down there and get back to the center of Town. He then mentioned how the place next to Scrubs Warehouse is getting ready to open and he heard that the owner of that “dumped a ton of money” into that building. Councilor Cathy Vargas asked if that is going to be a restaurant. Councilor Tim Moriarty said yes. He then said they know what they are going to end up with when they start throwing the “cheap little retail stores” across the way. Ray Carpentino said it is key that development occurs the right way and there needs to be quality development in order to bring back the downtown. He gave Storrs as an example and explained some more. He said that is like Blue Back Square. Councilor Tim Moriarty explained about the quality of this being done right so that this is on the higher end. He mentioned that the young professionals are looking for this now. They aren’t looking to buy houses because there isn’t any job security but they don’t mind paying big money for the high rent apartments. These are being built all over. There is a project in Windsor that costs almost a billion dollars. He explained that Winstanley is into all of this now too. Chairwoman Meg Casasanta said she thinks with Planimetrics coming in and looking at how things are really developing in Rocky Hill that they will be looking at trends to see where they are. She thinks that they want to make sure that they do economic development right.

Chairwoman Meg Casasanta asked the Subcommittee if there were any other questions or comments. There were none.

7. ADJOURN

Councilor Cathy Vargas made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:27 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Tim Moriarty and adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth
Recording Secretary